



Learning to Love the Land

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Karen's first experiences with agriculture arrived during a childhood road trip through the western United States. I know this seemingly has nothing to do with the kitchen or gardening, but I got to talking with my managing editor, Lisa Munniksmma, yesterday about our first experiences with agriculture.

We were trying to figure out what that really meant, and I decided to think about that first experience where I knew this kind of life was for me. So, here it goes...

Back in 1978, my mother and my grandmother took my sister and me, along with our two cousins, on a summer road trip through the western United States.

Our avocado-green VW bus departed Southern California for the Grand Canyon where we took in the beautiful, red clay gorges and watched the sunset. Next, we drove up to Durango, Colo., to visit a real dude ranch.

Turns out my mom backed the bus into a ditch, alongside a farm, where two cows gathered to chew their cud and observe the chaos that ensued.

A little detour, but we made it to the ranch, and I took my first-ever horseback ride.

At the time, I had no idea about string horses, so I thought this was a magical thing—my horse was doing exactly what I was asking of him! I must have a natural gift for this horseback riding thing, right?

After the ride, we all gathered for a cookout, complete with red-check tablecloths and enamelware plates and mugs, where they served barbeque. I remember wholeheartedly loving that experience, as contrived as it all seems today.

After Colorado, we headed north to Salt Lake City to take in some Mormon Tabernacle choir action, then further north to the Grand Tetons and Yellowstone National Park, where we stayed in a rustic, timber-framed lodge, where the fireplace soared up to the vaulted ceiling and the fire raged, even though it was June.

Buffalo, bears and assorted small creatures were not things I had ever seen in California in my relatively short life at that point, and I adored the otherness quality of this visit with Mother Nature.

From Yellowstone, we headed west to go white-water rafting on the Snake River where I experienced my first real adrenaline rush. Sleeping alongside the river in a tent, cooking over a campfire and staring at the stars in the company of good people with kindred spirits warmed my soul, and taught me the value of simple pleasures.

Now, on the road heading home, our last stop was Carson City, Nev., where the only thing I remember is something equivalent to a "Silver Dollar Saloon," with folks dressed up in Wild West attire. (I wasn't impressed!)

At the tender age of 7, my love of land, open spaces and animals was fostered on my summer-vacation Western road trip. Thanks, Mom. Look at me now!